

**EPISODE 1285**

[INTRODUCTION]

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**Darren Krakowiak (DK):** I think if you're going into a leadership role, one thing that you can do, whether you think you're a natural leader or not, is just to make the decision that I'm gonna take this responsibility seriously and I'm gonna do some work to be the best leader that I can be because a lot of the attributes of a good leader are really just skills that can be learned and improved on.

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**Whitney Sewell (WS):** This is your daily Real Estate Syndication Show. I'm your host, Whitney Sewell. Today our guest, he became an expert in leadership, and I think we can all use help in leadership. He's gonna go through some...it seems simple, but there are blind spots for myself and for many or most people. He's gonna help us to think through those, and even as we are in leadership positions, we need to be able to see other rising leaders as well. And we don't need to believe that we can't become one ourselves but you can. You can learn these skills that he lays out today. His name is Darren Krakowiak. He spent 20 years in commercial real estate based in Australia and Korea with firms such as CBRE and JLL. He now owns and operates the CRE success platform where he works with real estate leaders to develop their people and grow their business. He also equips industry professionals with proven client-attraction and retention systems so they can save time, earn more and be top performers in their market. I know you are gonna become a better leader after listening to Darren today.

[INTERVIEW]

**0:01:31**

**WS:** Good Morning, Darren. Welcome to the show. Happy to meet you and have you on. And just from your experience, you're gonna add a ton of value in our space to the listeners today.

Give us a little more about that though. Who are you? Tell us a little bit about the business you've grown and the people you're helping now and let's dive in.

**0:01:47.7**

**DK:** Great. I've been in business for about two years. I'm based in Melbourne, Australia and for 12 years of my commercial real estate Korea, I was based in Seoul, South Korea. So, that's something a little bit different about me. I was sent out there by JLL in 2007, and I ended up switching from JLL to CBRE while I was over there. I had a bunch of different leadership opportunities that I probably wouldn't have gotten if I just stayed here in Melbourne, so that was an amazing opportunity. When I came back to Melbourne in 2019, I noticed that there was, in my opinion, a bit of a gap when it comes to leadership capability in the industry, but also role models and people who are serving the industry from a training and development perspective. So, I saw a lot of people doing that in residential real estate in this part of the world, but not really in commercial. I know in the United States and in North America, you do have plenty of people doing commercial real estate training and coaching. It doesn't really exist in this part of the world, so I thought there's a gap and that's something I can do to serve people and to make a meaningful contribution. So I started in this business in 2020, and we've been going for a couple of years now. It's called CRA Success, and my main focus is to help commercial real estate leaders with developing their people and also growing their business.

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**WS:** Love that. We can all use help in that space, to say the least. I know I can. We're always trying to improve that and we're talking about even before we started, you were talking about creating that environment that helps others succeed in learning how to be that kind of leader. Get us started a little bit. I know you said you were given many opportunities when you transitioned there. Help us see that a little bit. What helped you to grow in your leadership abilities? And then let's help the listeners and myself do the same.

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**DK:** I think one thing that helped me grow, one point in time, in particular, was when I was put through a leadership assessment which included a 360. A 360 is a process that sometimes

corporates do, where they'll ask your peers, people above you, people below you, and people external to the organization, just to provide some feedback about how they perceive you. And I got some pretty brutal feedback at that moment that included that I was pretty bad-tempered and that I was seen as arrogant. That was a bit of a wake-up call for me that if that's the way people saw me, then perhaps I needed to make some changes. And I did.

And once I started focusing more on those areas, I started to do a lot better with my interpersonal skills, with leading others, helping them be better and also being a more effective leader. And I was continually given more responsibility up to the point where I was leading a business for 300 people. So, that was a real inflection point for me, understanding what my blind spots were and actually getting to work on them. I think if you're willing to do a little bit of introspection or if someone comes and hits you in the head like they did with me and tells you exactly what's wrong with you - although they didn't tell me everything, they told me a few things - then, that can be a really great opportunity for you to work on some things that can help you be the best leader that you can be so you can help others to be the best that they can be.

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**WS:** Wow. That's hard to hear, you receiving that feedback. I wonder, was that anonymous or was it not? How many people would that have been?

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**DK:** It was anonymous feedback, and I'm probably being a little bit hard on myself as I'm recounting the story now. There were the two consistent things that came through that would say something like - what's something that Darren needs to work on? And maybe the answer was - his temper? Other people might have said - no, he's good but he knows he's good, that's basically arrogance. So, that was something that I needed to dial back a bit. Probably the three A's that I need to work on was my arrogance, it was my anger management, but also alcohol. But that one about the alcohol, I had to learn the hard way about my drinking and I don't drink anymore. I have been without alcohol for two years. so it was kind of hard to see,

but it was anonymous as well. So, I couldn't actually track down the people that say, I can't believe that you said this. They were protected by the process

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**WS:** That's great. It's great that you were able to receive that feedback and do something about it. That it was constructive and you do better. It helps you to change. Speak to just receiving that. I can see many people being very angry, receiving feedback like that. Speak to being able to be willing and humble, I guess, which is so difficult to hear things like that. How are you able to do that at that time?

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**DK:** It's very difficult to argue with what's there in black and white and it's coming from a range of sources. So, I think you need to be willing to accept it, and probably the company - I can't remember exactly how they sort of prepared us for the feedback - but they probably let us know that - how you're gonna see some things in this report, they probably don't put you in the most flattering light, be open and receptive to that and be prepared for it. And certainly, my 360, as I took on more leadership responsibility, I saw way more brutal 360s than mine was. So, I've seen some shockers. So, it wasn't really that bad. I took it okay, I took it on board.

I saw it as a learning and growth opportunity. And what was really good was when I did another 360 a few years later when I had moved organizations and looking at those key areas, when it came to anger management, for example, the worst thing that somebody said was - we can tell when he's upset because of the look on his face. And so, okay, well, that's real progress because they don't say that I'm like an anger management crazy person, for lack of a better term. Just that we can see when he's upset and I'm like, well, I'm a human, right? If I'm not throwing things and yelling or swearing or anything, but you can just see on my face that I'm a little bit uncomfortable with what's going on, then I've made real progress from where I was. I was happy to hear that.

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**WS:** Yeah, it's incredible. I love the 360 thought process and creating that path for other people around you to provide feedback, could be so helpful. Speak to now helping us create an environment like that, where other people were helping other people on the team succeed and we're just leading in that way. How do you advise people to do that now and maybe some issues that you see often in our space?

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**DK:** I think we don't always have the opportunity to have a 360 assessment done. But given we spend a bit of time talking about that, I would say one thing that you can do is just have a think about - how is it that others are seeing me? And what is it that they're likely to advise me to do more of, to do less of, to start doing, to stop doing? So, that simple framework of "more, less, start, stop" and thinking about the type of advice that you'd be getting from someone who has your best interests at heart can be some good things to think about. Now, you may not be able to pick up all the things that they may say but if you start thinking about other people's perception of you, that's going to be a good place to start.

At the same time, leadership is not a popularity contest. So, I don't think that you should be necessarily trying to do things that are gonna make you well-liked. It's more about being respected and taking on the responsibility of the role. And one problem that I've identified in commercial real estate - but I think it's a common problem throughout a lot of industries, particularly sales-based industries - is that a lot of people who are put into leadership positions are given that responsibility as a reward for their high performance as opposed to them showing an inclination towards wanting to take on that responsibility or demonstrating a capability to be able to perform in that role.

And I think often people take on the role because they think it's a bigger office, it's a bigger title, it's a bigger commission check or a profit share, and I've been here so many years, it's my right, that's the natural progression of things. But they don't necessarily stop and think - well, hang on, is this what I want? Is this what's best for me? Is this what's best for people around me? And I think if you're going into a leadership role, one thing that you can do, whether you think you're a natural leader or not, is just to make the decision that I'm gonna take this

responsibility seriously and I'm gonna do some work to be the best leader that I can be because a lot of the attributes of a good leader are really just skills that can be learned and improved on. I think making the decision to be the best leader that you can be and to have a think about how it is you're perceived are some things that you can do in order to give yourself the best shot at being effective in a role that requires leadership.

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**WS:** What are some of those characteristics that you see in someone that you wanna promote to leadership? What are some of those things that would help you recognize that not just because they've been there the longest like you mentioned? What do you see in that person?

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**DK:** I think that they would be someone who role-models the desired behaviors that we wanna see in the organization. They probably embody the values that the organization says they are looking to espouse. I think the elements of emotional intelligence are really important so having an understanding of yourself and understanding of others, having self-control over your actions, self-awareness of how you're perceived, motivation to continue to strive for more, being willing to enable to articulate the big picture, to see things from all angles not just from your own perspective, to have empathy. They are the few things that I think would be that I'd be looking for from a leader as opposed to someone who can necessarily just hit certain benchmarks in terms of performance in their previous role. I'd be looking at a lot more of those soft skills in order for me to believe that someone is well-suited to a broader leadership role.

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**WS:** That's a great list. I'll try to get those down, so like that. But do you believe that - you mentioned a little bit earlier - people can be natural leaders? Or do you feel like, more times than not, it's a learned skill? Or someone's taking action on self-improvement, or some people just more natural than others?

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**DK:** I think some people are more natural than others but I think everyone can be better at it if they decide to. And I believe that an unnatural leader can be a better leader than a natural leader if a natural leader doesn't have any intention or decision to be a good leader and a person who is perhaps not as predisposed to leadership actually decides that, hey, this is something that I wanna get good at. Yes, there are natural leaders, but that doesn't in itself mean that you're going to be a good leader. I think it's more about the intent and the decision to, you know, leadership is not about you, it's about the people you lead. And so if you're willing to take on that responsibility and also make part of your career, part of your role about other people, then that's going to go a long way to making you a better leader than just having some of those attributes which people associate with strong or natural leadership.

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**WS:** I love that. You just said being a leader is not about you, it's about the people you're leading. That tells you a lot about if someone's gonna be a good leader or not. I believe it's how they interact with everyone, like you're talking about so much. And you mentioned, do they exhibit your core values and emotional intelligence, self-control, those things. You and I talked briefly before we started recording - the way you relate to others will ultimately determine your success. Elaborate on that a little bit. Obviously, it's what we're talking about too, as being a leader. But go a little more in-depth about that.

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**DK:** I think if you're a commercial real estate agent, if you're an investor, people want to see people succeed if they like that person. If they don't like that person, they're not cheering you on from the sidelines. Now again, that doesn't mean that you have to be the most-liked person, but I think being friendly and cooperative and likable can go a long way to making others more predisposed to want to help you or at least to not be inclined to deliberately go out of their way to be unhelpful. So, understanding the importance of people skills and being that type of person that other people want to see succeed, or at least are happy to see succeed. If you're that person who is gonna be promoted to a role and then there's gonna be an uproar because you've been promoted into that role, then you're gonna have difficulties continuing to get promoted or continuing to advance in your organization. If you're an agent or an investor, and

some people just don't feel like they wanna give you a leg up, then they will look for reasons and ways to sort of not include you in the process, or at least they'll be favoring other people who they can prefer to deal with because they sort of like dealing with that other person better.

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**DK:** So, people are people. People want to deal with others who make them feel comfortable and who they have some affinity too. So it's important, I think, even if you're not naturally a people person, to at least put some effort and intention behind the way that you relate with others. Probably that's something that even though I'm an extrovert, being likable and agreeable and cooperative is something that doesn't necessarily come naturally to me. So, it's something that I've had to work a little bit harder at in order to make sure that people are happy to refer me work. That people are happy to recommend me or write me a testimonial or to continue to work with me. I wanna make sure that there's nothing on the personal side of interacting with me that would stop people from doing that. And if I'm doing that and I'm doing work to the best of my ability and making sure that I'm doing what I say I will do and I'm delivering what I promise to deliver, then, unless someone's just way better than me, then there's not really any reason why I can't be successful.

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**WS:** Give the listeners and me some of those actionable steps that would help us, that you could say, okay, today you can start doing this thing or two things or three. Whatever it is that would help us to work our way to becoming better leaders. Not only for yourself but obviously for the people we lead, the teams that we have on board right now.

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**DK:** So, I think understanding from a leadership perspective, a few things I ask people that I'm working with to understand is - Where are we going? Why are we going there? And how will we know when we've arrived? So, just having a clear idea about where you want to take things, a pathway towards getting there in terms of how you're going to get there and why it matters to us. So, it has to be more than just making money. There needs to be a bit of a story behind it to motivate people that we bring people along in the journey. And then how will we know that



we'll get there? It's just the benchmarks. And just how are we going to measure success? We'll know we'll get there when we've done this or when we're starting to attract this type of client, or when we have achieved this level of production or revenue. So, I think being able to know where you wanna go, to understand why it matters, and communicate that with others is a really important thing from a leadership perspective.

I forget what the other part of the question was though, Whitney, so apologies if I...

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**WS:** No, just some actionable steps for us to improve our leadership skills today for the listeners and myself to benefit us and our entire team.

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**DK:** I think probably understanding emotional intelligence as well. So, understanding how you're perceived by others, thinking about the way that other people see you, and the way that your behavior impacts others is really important. And that's all about empathy. It's about controlling your behavior to make sure that you're not impacting other people in a negative way. So, it's self-control, it's self-awareness, it's empathy, it's those sort of elements of emotional intelligence.

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**WS:** Can you speak to a time when maybe your leadership was questioned or challenged in some way and how to handle that?

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**DK:** Yeah. So, probably about less than a year into my tenure at CBRE, and this was in South Korea which is a very hierarchical culture, and I took on that role when I was 35 years old. People in the industry and people who are older than me may have issues with the fact that I was in that role. And I guess I did still have the reputation of being a bit of a hothead even though I had done some work on my own, sort of anger management. But I was still seen as quite an aggressive person, and maybe someone who was too aggressive and we need to do things in a different way in Korea and that's not the right style and whatever. And I guess a lot

of people who weren't happy with the fact that I had been given that position were still looking for ways to agitate me and looking to see if they could poke and prod me to see if they could get a rise out of me. For the most part, I didn't give them that opportunity.

But, I remember there was one occasion when I was in a meeting and somebody wasn't listening. I indicated to them that I wanted them to listen to the conversation with a little bit more focus and that person didn't follow my instructions or my request. And I got quite angry at them. I swore at them, which is probably not something that you would do in Korea. I think in western culture, if you're the boss it wouldn't be the end of the world but in Korea, oh God, he swore. So, it was this big thing and they made a complaint and all of this sort of stuff. And I think outside of Korea, my bosses were like - What's this about? Who cares? But I could actually say what the big deal was because, probably, it was something that typically a boss wouldn't do.

And it probably was what they were looking for in terms of what they'd heard about me or what they thought was their problem with me. So, I really did let myself down by giving them that rise. But I think it was also a little bit of, it sort of broke some of the tension. I think something sort of had to ball to the surface and funnily enough, after that incident, things got a lot better. That was the thing that kind of brought us all a bit closer together, in a way, because we sort of had it out a bit, and then we move forward and you choose some really great things. So, that's the one that comes to mind. I've never told that story before so I apologize if it wasn't a very clear story as I was telling it

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**WS:** It's just interesting to hear. And it's great that you learn, you grew from that, and hopefully, we can all do that as those things happen because they're bound to. Shifting gears a little bit, Darren, with your experience in commercial real estate, and obviously, you're working with numerous people in this industry now, do you have any predictions or any thoughts on the current market and what you see happening today or what you expect over the next, say, six to twelve months?

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**DK:** Well, I think in terms of leadership, I think we're less likely to see people who are not interested in leadership. Or just on who has been in organizations for a long time given that responsibility. I think commercial real estate organizations are much more likely to reflect what's going on in other industries and have more focus on a people-focused leadership approach. So, I think that's likely to be something that we'll see. I think that commercial real estate as an industry, in my opinion, is a little bit of a dinosaur and a little bit of a laggard in some ways in terms of the culture and in terms of diversity, and representation. It's probably a little bit better in Australia than it is from what I've heard in North America, but still, it's, if you get out of the big firms, once you're not in the big firms, it's still generally one shade of color and one gender, it's fairly well-represented in commercial real estate.

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**DK:** So, I think that will continue to change. Maybe it's not a year, but I think that commercial real estate of our time will start to more accurately reflect what's going on in the rest of the population. Because it will need to, because commercial real estate is something that more and more people from an investment side are getting into particularly as our residential becomes a less attractive investment vehicle for some people because of a range of reasons. I think more people will be looking at other opportunities and that will include commercial and that will create more opportunities for different people to be able to serve clients in the marketplace. So, the two things I would say are more of a focus on leadership and leadership being a core competency within organizations. More of a focus on some modern things like technology, personal branding, but also some of the things that we value more in modern society, like diversity, for example.

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**WS:** What about some daily habits that you have, Darren, that you are disciplined about that have helped you achieve success?

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**DK:** So I don't do this recently but when I used to - and that's just 'cause I'm a bit more chilled out, 'cause I'm getting a little bit older - but when I was a man in a hurry on a mission, I used to like listening to - I'm still that person but just a little bit more chill - one thing I used to like doing was I would record my goals. I'd record them on my phone, and then I'd listen to them every day. And I'd also have them in my calendar as a reminder that would pop up every day, and I would just be reminded of these are the sort of things that I'm working towards. I think that's a really good thing to do. Other people like to put post-it notes up, whether it's on your fridge or your bathroom mirror, somewhere where you're gonna see it every day. Just so you can remind yourself of what's important. It's a good way just to remind your mind about what matters. The other one is just a bit of daily exercise. I think that's good for your mental health, for your physical health, to remain active, and to be as healthy as you can be. It's still relevant, I think, to the question you asked.

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**WS:** Yeah, all those things play a role together. No doubt about it. And Darren, how do you like to give back?

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**DK:** How do I like to give back? I guess, well, I became a father for the first time two years ago so, that's had a very big impact on my life. And that's probably one of the reasons why I'm a little bit of a less intense person when it comes to my professional goals. It's because being a father has had a big change in my perspective on life. So, at the moment, my giving back is supporting my wife and my daughter and being the best father, and being the best parent that I can be.

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**WS:** That's awesome. Congratulations, by the way. No doubt. It will change you.

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**DK:** I should have said, the best husband I can be, as well. So, I'll just put that too.

**0:22:37.0**

**WS:** That's right. Well, Darren, a pleasure to meet you and have you on the show. It's encouraging to hear your story on how you place in leadership, how you received that 360 assessment and how that changed you and how that helped you to see issues. All of us have those blind spots, no doubt about it. I just think it's great how you received that and then decided to change and because of that feedback, you became a better leader. Then now, you're helping many other people do the same thing. Even the question of what would others say about me, "more, less, start, stop". I think that's great to think through and maybe even ask your team. And how you said leadership is not a popularity contest, and the characteristics you listed out as well - role model, core values, emotional intelligence, self-control over actions, willingness to strive more, and to see things from others' perspective. You've given us great groundwork here to see leaders in our organization but I think also how they help us personally to think through these things. How can the listeners get in touch with you and learn more about you?

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**DK:** I'm gonna have to listen back to that 'cause I did say some good stuff, didn't I? I surprise myself sometimes. The best way is to go to [CRESuccess.co/links](https://CRESuccess.co/links). And on that page, there are a few little downloads that people can grab, there's also a link to my podcast, into my social media. So, go there and then see if you'd like to take the next step.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[OUTRO]

**0:23:59.2**

**WS:** Thank you for being a loyal listener to the Real Estate Syndication Show. Please subscribe and like the show. Share it with your friends so we can help them as well. Don't forget, go to the [www.LifeBridgeCapital.com](http://www.LifeBridgeCapital.com) where you can sign up and start investing in real estate today, Have a blessed day!

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